



A Paper Bag of Moths

S. LaRue — 4/2014

Before you're even given a chance to grasp the concept, you get the evil eye from your folks if you don't appear to be happy about whatever it is you've been tasked to participate in.

Little league ball teams, miniature golf on Saturday morning, picnics in the park — covered in flies and the smell of burning flesh. Maybe a Cub Scout troop; dark blue shirts and complimentary bright yellow insignia, color-coded neckerchiefs cinched up with a cheap piece of tin — you go to some stranger's house and a volunteer, some poor kid's mom serves sour koolaid and stale cookies while you and all the other unfortunates glue popsicle sticks into what-ever-the-fuck-it-is yer supposed to be interested in.

One of the housewives that ran my troop for a minute made the mistake of making fresh cupcakes for our high-strung gang of pretend Hitler youths. We'd all wear our uniforms to school the day of the “pack” meeting (liked being in a pack as a kid but soon grew to despise mob mentality). An uptight-pants-suite-clad-chubber, she was being stingy with the cupcakes, making sure each young republican got his fair share, which as it turns out is one.

When we realized there were three extras a couple of us made our move. The housewife threw herself in between us and the cupcakes and paid dearly for her faux pas. Teddy Hall kicked the bitch in the shin, hard as he could and she literally *went down*. We'd yet to receive instruction in First Aid, so we ignored her, headed for the cupcakes and

reduced them to dust while tussling over who was going to get one.

This transpired in the cruel, barren wasteland of the Texas panhandle. You should at least drive through sometime so you can say you've seen all the trees leaning North. The wind never, ever stops blowing; seriously — it never stops. All day, all night. Its like living in a tornado.

There's no geography — oh sure, there's dirt under your feet, but even if you had a high powered telescope you'd be hard pressed to see anything much larger than the mountains of cow shit they pile up outside the stockyards dotting the surrounding expanse of NOTHING.

There's not one thing to even suggest to the wind it might consider laying off for a second while it traverses a small mountain range or has to sidestep a few rolling hills. Flat as a board but somehow a lot less interesting. I lived there until I was 10.

On my way home from elementary school I'd regularly succumb. I'd stretch my shirt enough to protect my face, leaving my torso to take the brunt of turbo-charged-sandblast -punishment I was to endure every school day. I'd drop my books on the ground and the wind would carry my papers to the next county in a split second. I'd sit on the curb and cry — an eternity of frustration — my second-grade-attending-lily-white-ass had been constantly pummeled by 40 to 60mph winds that occasionally found a stash of rusty, unattended razor blades to take on a cross-country trip, impaling children foolish enough to be outside.

On more than one occasion I've had mental health professionals advise against time spent in a windy environment. One of them referred to it as “...a whole body irritant.” People living at or near these specific coordinates of Earth tend to be testy, painfully short on education and open minded, but not in a way that might suggest they'd host a mixer for young enthusiastic Libertarians, one of which being their openly gay son. More open minded in that they're always hungry for something they don't understand to hate because, well, “What are you talking about?!? *You caint field dress a deer?* What the hell's WRONG with you?” ¹

When I'd finally work up the inner strength to fight my way home from school, when I walked in the door I'd better be cheerful, better not show signs of frustration or anything resembling displeasure.

My father worked long hours and my mom had pretend jobs sometimes too, so they could have scads of off-green paper rectangles to trade for stuff *they told us we wanted* — stuff from TV, sometimes shit everyone had *but us* — our folks would see it and then, *we did*.

Once purchased, the latest and greatest worthless piece of crap offered as a must-have-consumable made my folks all proud and shit. They'd been blessed by having access to the cornucopia of trash touted by ad agencies as a way to 'save time, improve your leisure time and get you laid more often.

Strange to see them both perform unusual hand gestures when people were over and the new thing was called into focus based solely on it's newness. Especially if the new thing happened to be blocking the exit after the fourth round of cocktails, "How did our New RCA Console Stereophonic Automatic Record Changing Apparatus get in front of the door? You darn kids! Outside – right now ya little monsters" and the channeling of Vanna White would begin in earnest.

While being exiled, branded as suspects in the covert repositioning of bulky furnishings, a message was relayed via a quick glare and an exaggerated eyebrow flex which meant "SMILE! We're happy about the new thing, AND SO ARE YOU!"

If we weren't bathed in verve, perhaps having the poor taste to appear slightly less than giddy, it meant we didn't appreciate their efforts. It reflected badly on the entire family if the children weren't viciously hacking at each other with oversized, razor-sharp machetes in a *winner-mows-all, Clash-of-the-Tiny-Titans* for the right to proudly pilot the family's recently acquired *Self-Propelled SEARS & Roebuck Uranus 600* (powder blue to match our Valiant 4-door — that's it, right over there) in 110 degree heat with 90% humidity — a treasured gift to be sure; an honor to savor — reason at long last to behead a sibling sans the whole John Law song and dance. Remember, *we're in Texas*.

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I don't know if you've ever been eight years old in the early 1960s, but bicycles were all the rage. We didn't have bikes, me and my little bro. Every lower-middle-class-family on our block had made the gargantuan financial sacrifice and purchased a bicycle for each of their children when they were big enough to pilot them with a modicum of safety.

These were people that regularly had their automobiles repossessed, but they made sure their kids were fully immersed in the vision of *Caprotti*, his initial sketches, found among those of *Leonardo-Little-D* and were the springboard for what was to become practical, economical and easily maintained rolling transportation.

Some gal down the street used to let me ride hers once in a while. I was so hungry for my own set of wheels I took to getting up in the wee hours of the morning, sneaking out of the house, waltzing into her backyard and proceeding to tool around the hood until I'd notice her family on the front porch; coffee mugs, terrycloth slippers, bathrobes, hair

askew and eyes not yet awake enough to convey their true feelings regarding youth's tendency to trespass.

I wasn't headed for Mexico or anything, just riding back and forth on Lilac Lane wearing an unforced smile. They used the insurance excuse to restrict my riding of their daughter's bike when they told my father of the brazen activities I'd chosen to undertake. The son that didn't smile much was now pilfering glee from the neighbors — how they managed to view it as a malicious act was completely out of my reach, but didn't spare me from getting the crap beaten out of me for the heinous crime of seeking joy.

My first bike was given to my father by a stranger; a fellow employee — he'd heard I was eight and didn't have a bike, so he dug out an 1800s model, one made before that most-miraculous of bicycle safety systems, *the Coaster Brake* became standard issue.

If the bike was in motion, forward or backwards, the pedals and sprocket were turning. I wasn't displeased as much as I was confused. I'd never seen a bike like that, didn't know they existed. I was expected to hop aboard and pedal off into the sunset unabated by common sense which would have found the bicycle still in my fathers hands right below his leering face, as he happily offered me an easy way out of my life, there in the paradise of Amarillo via a tragically intentional cycling accident.

I'd been afforded the pleasure of riding the other bikes in the neighborhood, and here I was, trying to ride this *thing* with no brakes, pedals that never stopped churning, and an audience comprised of my parents and little brother, two of which were stern-faced and the other aghast.

I managed to climb aboard and get it moving forward at a stutter. I picked up speed and did not like what was happening.

Being a witty little bugger, able to scheme my way into pre-dawn backyards undetected for nefarious purposes, when it became imperative I bring the great, great, great, great grandfather of cycling systems to a halt, I quickly reviewed my options;

- 1) Apply reverse pressure to the pedals thus slowing them, a concept I've failed to grasp to this day.
- 2) Spread my legs far enough apart as to avoid the maliciously whirling pedals and slam the toes of my *Keds* into the pavement in hopes of dragging myself to a stop.
- 3) Head for the nearest lawn and jump off leaving the Satan-Cycle to crash thru some innocent party's screen door.
- 4) Make a hard right to avoid the oncoming, unmanned Sherman Tank, suck it up and eat some pavement.

I opted to improvise. Disregarding the dangerous collection of metals between my legs, I threw the bulk of my 47 pounds upward and to the right, leaving the bicycle to take the brunt of the tank impact. I was sliding along the pavement on my chest, knees and the palms of my hands as the ill-willed-two-wheeler miraculously made a 120 degree turn, pedals akimbo, dodging the tank in favor of implying itself into a fresh-off-the-showroom-floor Chrysler 300 driver's side door, leaving an impressive dent. The thought crossed my mind it must have practiced this move in it's youth, when rogue tanks roamed the streets in packs. This was obviously not the bike's first rodeo.

Once I'd traversed the better part of Lilac Lane without the need to slow or stop, my audience had retired to the air conditioned cottage we called home and were not witness to the impaling of the aforementioned Chrysler. Good-Neighbor-Loveland worked nights, but I waited behind a nearby hedge for a while prior to retrieving the rolling jaws of death and, walking it down the center of the street, toward home, I was hoping for another tank, one in a big hurry and unable to avoid obliterating the hate-cycle, when at the last second, I shoved it into said tank's path. I had no such luck. The two-wheeled terror, now covered in my blood seemed to be pleased with itself which, along with the absence of marauding tanks at mid-day, I found odd.

No smile inspectors were visible when I got home, my injuries were beginning to throb and it was all I could do to lock my cries of pain way, way, way down in my little tummy where they belong.

Remembering my back yard cunning, I stealthily made my way into my own, hid the god damn thing, called it the filthiest name I had on file at eight and walked away intending to let it return to the Earth unmolested.

My illusive smile was missing, hadn't felt compelled to attend my being gifted with a child mangling device from the days of yore; even a cursory appearance was not warranted. I'd taken it for a spin only to crash into the pavement stopping my face from being ground to hamburger by sacrificing the majority of the front of my body. I was still picking pieces of 1960s Texas asphalt from under my skin a week later.

Somehow this incident showed no sign of relevance when, still bleeding after ditching the dreaded pseudo-bike to the side of the backyard shed, smiling was the furthest thing from my mind, suggesting to my father the intensity of the associated beating be delivered with all due diligence.

That was the first time I kinda got it; *I was supposed to act happy all the time*. It was hard to play like you were hopped up on goofballs when ya looked a little closer; you smelled the stockyards surrounding you, without fail the wind would pelt you with sand, impale you with twigs, crash small mammals into your solar plexus, you'd see the

shacks and the moronic fat asses standing together drinking Hamm's Tall Boys, you could feel the heat from the murderous-antique-bi-cycle wafting out from beside the shed, The DDT trucks fogged the neighborhoods every other day (that one made us smile – Here comes the cloud truck!) and on and on and on.

I hadn't been promised a pleasant experience, but I'd sure been exposed to what it was supposed to look like on the TeeVee and such.

It hasn't changed much; the PR Boys are still whipping snappy slogans and imagery that *pops*, burns itself onto your retinas – every image we see screams,

**ARE YOU HAPPY YET?
OF COURSE NOT!**

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**You Haven't Got the NEW Happiness Widget
Check that shit out – these Intellectual Sex Gods Were Once Like You
Widget-less Goons, Adrift, Alienated Dumbasses...
But NOT ANYMORE!**

~

**They Gave Us Money, We Gave Them PARADISE!
Available NOW!**

at fine Walmarts Everywhere (void where prohibited by religious zealots)

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That my father was pretty successful in the oil business was all the more reason for me to smile like a drunken Shriner. My parents had a few bucks; but both had been raised in homes the depression had tainted with the stench of hoarding. They were both taught the smart move was hiding what you had so no one dare ask for your help. They didn't really understand what it meant to give, but the television was proof enough their kids were supposed to be happy, clever and clean behind the ears.

They'd drop a couple of bucks once in a while and buy us clothing appropriate for the location of their real estate holdings — little matching cowboy outfits complete with *authentic* plastic cowboy boots from a place called *Blue Goose* shoes. What the fuck is there to be happy about when yer wearing plastic imitation cowboy boots and some plaid outfit with piping all over it? It was hot, uncomfortable and when they'd make you put it on, it was because they were about to show their chillenz off at the *Amarillo Bowling League Mixer* and they wanted their immortality insurance, insisted their *birth captives* were looking as “*H-A-N-D-S-O-M-E*” as humanly possible, plastic foot melters not withstanding.

My happiness seemed real when many years later the gal at *Blue Goose* announced my feet were no longer eligible for free plastic boots. My mother winced for a split second at the thought of buying real boots. Then her thrifty nature quickly opted for a pair of *Keds*. Even the sales gal was taken aback when mommy parroted the phrase from the television commercial, “*Kids go better in Keds!*” I wanted the red high-tops, got black low-tops instead.

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When puberty hit, my hormones insisted I become even more confused. There was never a discussion around the relationship between coitus and happiness — no helpful tips offered by other Earth inhabitants experiencing similar awkward stirrings. And where did all this hair come from?

The increased frequency of poorly timed erections, did nothing to stem the tide of strange erotic imagery portraying 24 year old, lingerie models as Pontiac driving bank managers — the sexual component of being happy had yet to become a blip on my radar. That didn't matter though. At 14 I was expected to know all about sidestepping my inner thunder storms in order to display a bonafide smile, even on days obscured by a blur of GTOs piloted by scantily clad financial magnates weaving effortlessly through heavier-than-usual tank traffic.

I was encouraged to work hard, focus intently on an unspoken moral code the contents of which were loosely defined, at best. I was to think happy thoughts because, “*You think bad things, bad is what ya get.*”

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By the time I was 20, there it was in crisp focus, exactly as it had been the day the first propaganda machine sputtered to life. I felt I had been there:

I could hear the distinct sound of Freud and Bernays horking rails off a framed photo of Siggys cigar-smoking mother, while Nazi mechanics in crisp, dark uniforms lunged at a menacing contraption, waving pipe wrenches and barking, “ARBEIT! DIE Arebeit! KUMM DU HURE! SCHNELLER!” — the background audio was a Chrysler product starter — spiraling up like a blender on steroids, re-tetetetete-CLACK, re-tetetetete-CLACK, re-tetetetete-CLACK.... and when the first official propaganda machine coughed itself awake, belched its first black cloud of manipulation fueled lies — TAA! DAAAA! — the happiness carrot dangling from a stick, just out of reach, lurched into existence;

“and it was good....”

Embracing societal edicts by emitting cheer at all times was touted as the only way you'd ever get close enough to make your play. At times I felt I deserved to be a Cleaver family member; Steve Cleaver has a nice ring to it – my pals would call me 'The Stever', yeh, sure.

Once in a while I'd work up the nerve to stick my arm out, as the merry-go-round pig I was riding approached the ring dispenser and take a shot at that Waldorf salad in the rough.

When I ventured into said territory someone would make the stick longer, or attach weights to my ankles or who-the-fuck-knows would happen and happiness would slip away, again and again and again. Pretending to the point of exhaustion, I'd dig deep, find the strength to endeavor to persevere. By then I was fairly certain this happiness spoken of with nauseating regularity was indeed myth, and try as I may, my efforts would ultimately fall short of bringing fantasy into the realm of reality.

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I could be dead wrong, but I imagine myself to be, have evidence on hand, I think shows I'm not a bad guy, have compassion for others, empathy, do what I think is best for all in most situations when in fact I'm unable to offer myself the same courtesies I might offer a stranger.

When acting altruistically, people interpret it as your being so magnanimously happy with your own circumstance, you have *joy to spare and yer busily spreading it around, planting the seeds of bliss and lovingly giving them the care needed to bear fruit.*

My reasons for doing service, for helping others, for giving stuff away, often leads to there being none left for me, which of course, has nothing to do with an overabundance of cheer. I do it because I've yet to find anything that makes me happy.

I can catch a fleeting glimpse of hope if I involve myself in the aid of others. At the very worst, I'll be issued a court order to begin attending the “*Let me get that for you*” 12 step program.

Oh Shit...

Hey! HEEEEYYYY! — **do not** get the movie rolling in your head of me working the soup line at the homeless shelter, perhaps visiting the elderly and reading them stories about motor boats and fine dining, helping disabled children to memorize bible verses

and shit like that — ***NOT what I'm referring to at all.***

I'm talking about everyday bullshit people have to manage. I only have a couple of people that come to my home on any sort of regular basis, but I buy food I know they like for when they drop by. If someone is out of gas or about to be, I'll toss them my last \$10 and worry about it later when I'm out of cigarettes and searching the car for loose change. Everyone I know has express instructions to call me when and if they end up in the county lockup at 3am for running the only stop sign in "*Nobody-Lives-Here*" County while Officer Neil was staked out for the One Hundredth Night in a Row.

Those aren't things I do to make room in my overflowing happiness goblet, those are things I do so others will know someone cares about them, thinks they're worth making an effort for, and if I can make someone feel a little better, it makes me feel a little better. But happy?

Nah.

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Honestly? I don't think its out there,
NOT AVAILABLE / OUT OF STOCK.

I'm 58 freakin years old and I have never, ***not once*** met a person I would define as happy. I've met giggling miscreants that later turn out to be mental, drunk or drugged. The thing that really strikes me though is the people I've associated with, the educated, intelligent and thoughtful, never once outwardly expressed their dismay at not being the widely accepted Jesus-Land version of a happy person. That happiness, is smoke and mirrors, subterfuge, lies and play acting. It's a paper bag filled with moths. ²

You've seen it, right? Seen the price tag hanging there, all that? The creeps running this bullshit society, I'm referring to "*the land culture wisely chose to abandon,*" America, might as well publish a catalog of what is required to OWN happiness in a society that's been born of greed, distrust, hate, a lack of cessation that would fill the grand canyon many times over, petty belief systems originating in the Bronze Age and an affinity for aggressively belittling insects.

A catalog for a people that have accepted their role as consumers, lemmings that keep the boxes coming out of the factories, think of nothing but themselves and how to gain more power by taking it from someone weaker than they...

Earthlings, sentient beings with perfectly accessible and functioning reasoning abilities make the conscious decision to ignore reason in favor of fitting into this sick-fuck

country where they were BORN as slaves.

The formula for happiness is an equation without an answer. If you manage to crunch the numbers quickly and accurately enough, your station will advance, you're surroundings will become more luxurious, the food you eat will have fewer toxins, but you'll still spend your every spare moment flipping through the catalog establishing things which are missing, things you need to finally, truly and honestly be happy.

When the quarterly catalog is distributed, there will be omissions and additions, more of the latter every fucking time it lands on your porch along with the new phone book (no joke kiddies, we used to get these big, hulking books tossed on the porch, filled with tiny adverts and an alphabetized list of everyone in town's HOME phone number AND their address! You could seek out people you'd recently met, call and invite them for cocktails or show up unannounced at their place with gallon of Hellman's just *because...*)

More will always be expected of you; more work, a more appealing appearance, more money, more clothing, more food, more material possessions, more people you choose to enter into the contract stating, "We willing to tolerate each other in the guise of friendship. "

I feel certain, someone will run the four-minute-mile in the next few years. Some obsessed, muscle-bound toothpick will actually grab that particular carrot, and moments later there will be a deafening buzz filling the air about just who might be the 3:59 contender. Faster, slower, harder, softer — all arbitrarily tossed at you as ways to "make the grade," thus placing you in position to experience HAPPY...

I'm skeptical.

The richest person you know of, say Donald Trump for example; I'd bet my last nickel that dude is one miserable son of a bitch; lonely, sad, starving for some sort of real contact, someone of his ilk that will sing his praises right in his face, without a tinge of shame. Never happens. You've seen the prick — you wanna go hang with Donny, have a picnic? Play some table tennis?

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If you consider yourself a happy person, I apologize for placing this in front of you. I'm sorry you've read it and I hope your illusion is not destroyed thru closer examination should you have any curiosity remaining and reality is something you don't find threatening.

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When a dog chases a car he doesn't know why, he just does it because that's what he does. He's a quadruped mammal yielding to some ancient instinct to *attack all interlopers*. When the dog does it's job, if it openly threatens the giant metal thing, gesticulating and screaming, it will flee, vanish into a place the dog no longer has to worry about, it's home is once again free of automobiles and he can get back to eating cat shit.

Same with us bipeds; looking under every rock, rabbit's foot in our pocket, fingers crossed behind our back, hoping, praying we'll eventually come across a tiny box, wrapped in gold foil with a black ribbon tied in a perfect bow. When we open it, WHAMMO — happiness will have arrived.

If any of us sat around and thought about it for a bit, were completely honest with ourselves, looked for REAL LIFE examples, not manufactured by *The Happy Human Consortium and Balloon Folding Academy* called television, we'd come up empty handed. Even if we were to catch the car, we'd be at a complete loss as to what happens next, because... because...???? NO ONE HAS EVER CAUGHT THE FUCKING CAR!

Aren't you paying attention? There is no car. You know, the one we make payments on every second of every day? Even the wisest among us haven't a single clue as to what kind of car it is; a 1939 Stutz? Maybe... Early '70s Hemi Muscle Car? I'm not sure — guess you'll have to wait and see, cuz ain't nobody around here even close to agreeing. No one has said for certain it's NOT an 1800's bicycle with murdering children at the top of it's list — so there's that to mull over.

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Earlier I mentioned my 58 years of either pretending to be happy so as not to seem like I'm European or something as unsavory as Canadian and I sometimes felt happiness was within my grasp? When I could smell it, smell what I thought was the carrot, were invariably rare moments when, through some accident of fate, I'd acquired one of the BIG items from the catalog and felt like the others would soon follow. All I had to do was keep my yapper shut, not scare “possibility” away, ignore the reality of no one being happy and I felt my chances of actually owning that bag of moths would drastically improve by my not revealing the bag was nowhere to be found in the fucking first place.

Didja catch that? I thought if I continued to keep it a secret that happiness doesn't exist, this nonexistent thing would become real and live in my pocket. They're putting something in the water, and it ain't a Sandoz product.

I'm done. I was done a year ago right after turning 57. That was the day I threw a little

internal tantrum and screamed, “NO! NOOO! NONONONONONOOOOOO!”

If I no longer had happiness as my ultimate unattainable goal, what the fuck was I gonna do with myself? Should I stop lending a hand to those I care about? I don't think I could do that as I don't consider it a choice. Should I make clothes of animal skins and seek out a cave near a water source? Shoot my car with a bazooka? Take a hammer to this computer and just walk-the-fuck away?

I mean, that's a big question; if you no longer actively seek happiness, what will you fill your time with? What mark will you leave on mankind when you turn to dust and are shat upon by wildlife sometime in the future? I didn't and don't have an answer. 3

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I'm friends with nine year old twin boys and I find them totally over-amped on SOMETHING and yet so witty, accidental or otherwise, one of them taught me one of the most valuable lessons I've ever learned. This boy marched up to me with a makeshift pistol he'd constructed from lego blocks, pointed it at me and said, I shit you not, “Do something impossible!”

It took a second for the weight of that wisdom to land squarely on my head, but when it did my only move was beyond reproach; I did nothing. He chose not to shoot me with a pretend bullet, but that is far from the point. When an unanswerable question is posed, or a statement that is incredibly absurd on the face of it, what do you do with the query before you?

Attaining happiness, in the form touted by every single thing you're exposed to, is never gonna happen; it is impossible. When faced with the impossible I've been known to experience severe narcolepsy, that, or hail a cab and go someplace to have a double order of falafel.

For years, I have made no movement toward the carrot, have seen it for what it really is; it's the contents of the shortest novel ever written, a rather intense, untitled work by Earnest Hemingway:

“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

Considering my purposes, it would look more like this:

For sale: happiness, out of stock.

In the film *Fight Club*, the scene where a donut gobbling Meatloaf runs into Ed Norton

on the street and Norton asks if he's still attending a particular cancer support group and Meatloaf's reply is, "No, I've found something *so much better*," it sounds kinda preachy in the context of the film, and when I imply it here I'm not trying to "one-up" anybody. But I have indeed found something so much better than the happiness which will always be out of reach.

When I was faced with "Do the impossible or die!" I did what I always do; *nothing*. I ain't buyin' the Newt-Rockne-style attitude that ANYTHING is possible if ya just TRY hard enough — right? "Hey Newt, I gotcher *anything* right here pal...."

I can't hang glide and I won't attempt it without lengthy instruction and probably more tequila than recommended. So for all intents and purposes, its impossible for me to do successfully. Should a nine year old offer it as my only option in avoiding severe lead poisoning, oh, I'd strap the fucking thing on and fling myself from a cliff, no doubt plummet like a rock to a painful, lingering death... Ew. Wait... Nobody wants that. Yeah, bad call there — I'd rather get shot in the face.

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In my last year of doing nothing that would constitute the pursuit of happiness something *happened*. I didn't DO anything to attract it, in fact did very little other than occupy myself with the things I've encountered that have lifted my spirit. What I did was *STOP* doing the things I felt were possibly detrimental to my thought processes. In a week, maybe two, I regularly felt as though I'd spent the afternoon as my seven-year-old-self with my grandmother and we'd had one of her amazing meals to top off the day.

Sitting here, right where I am now, I looked up "contentment" to make sure its what I was experiencing. I took the opportunity to do the same for "happiness," do a little comparing with Mr. Webster as my guide.

con-tent-ment (*kuh n-tent-mu nt*)

noun

1. the state of being contented; satisfaction; ease of mind.
2. *Archaic.* the act of contentedly satisfied.
3. peace of mind; mental or emotional satisfaction

Origin:

1400-50; late Middle English *contentment* < Middle French

Synonyms:

1. see happiness <<<<< **Uh Oh...**

--adj.

1. mentally or emotionally satisfied with things as they are
2. assenting to or willing to accept circumstances, a proposed course of action, etc

#

hap-pi-ness (hap-ee-nis)

noun

1. the quality or state of being happy
2. good fortune, pleasure, **contentment**, joy

Synonyms:

1, 2. pleasure, joy, exhilaration, bliss, **contentedness**, delight, enjoyment, satisfaction. Happiness, bliss, **contentment**, felicity imply an active or passive state of pleasure or pleasurable satisfaction. Happiness results from the possession or attainment of what one considers good: *the happiness of visiting one's family*. Bliss is unalloyed happiness or supreme delight: *the bliss of perfect companionship*. — ***Contentment is a peaceful kind of happiness in which one rests without desires, even though every wish may not have been gratified: contentment in one's surroundings.*** — Felicity is a formal word for happiness of an especially fortunate or intense kind: *to wish a young couple felicity in life*.

--adj.

There are a ton of adjectives listed for happiness, with **contentedness** among them.

That, right there, would tend to make one believe the *two terms are interchangeable*, and I'm hoping your bright enough to realize they are, but only to a point. At a particular crossroads of the emotional self, the two can, and do, part ways. Happiness may not be able to survive without contentment, but contentment does not require happiness in a very similar way that turtles do not require hamburgers.

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Socrates:

“Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty.”

Happiness is overrated and there's a reason for that. It has to be alluded to as “available” and for that to work, the illusion has to be a little bit convincing, attractive, desirable due to someone else desiring it — not iron clad, just appearing to be something that will float out of the clouds and swallow you up when you've made the right moves.

You are shown, by example, what it looks like, where it takes place, how long it may

linger dependent on many arbitrary factors, all the while no mention of the absurdity of the initial concept is ever offered.

For a definition clearer than what I've offered here, it might be wise to seek an audience with the Waltons; the close knit family of eight Earthlings that get ALL the profit from their Walmart and Sam's Club money grubbing operations. Retail Sales Figures revolving around the hope of finding happiness are tightly scrutinized by this humble little family undertaking. There's simply no other way to determine the catalog contents for the next quarter if they can't offer up something with solid value and the hidden promise of your purchase causing neuron fireworks the likes of which you've not experienced.

What? Oh for fuck's sake — of course they're the publishers of the *Happiness Catalog*; the NSA, FBI, CIA, Facebook and Google are consulted and BINGO! Every 3 months a new recipe of ingredients is distributed. You thought maybe Santa was involved? Snap out of it. This is about profit, power, elitism, slavery, obfuscation, all that shit listed under “evil” or maybe under “*power tools*” wherein the description of various table saws is also available, you know, things that violently CUT SHIT UP?

Last I spoke with them, Christy, the 10th richest person on the planet grabbed the phone, (don't get me started! That gal is a *pistol*!) and in an obviously inebriated voice managed to say through her laughter, “*Stevie!!!! Babe, this shit gets easier every frickin year! POST TIME Mothuhfukahzzz!!!*” I heard the phone hit the floor (post time means it's time for another drink) and the voice of I'm guessing Vincent, the main “*handler*” of the house, saying “Good day sir,” a click, then a dial tone. Same thing every Christmas with that bunch. Good people.

I don't think they're happy, or even content. I think they're a little crazy, well, okay, a LOT crazy, which is about all you can really ask, considering the circumstances here on our “*Sphere of Titanium Loneliness*.”

If the Walton's can't afford a pink and white Tudor on Pine Street in Mayfield (state withheld) next door to Ward and June, *the mythical neighborhood of Happiness*, we're gonna have a tough time procuring a refrigerator box in an Amarillo alley, and just forget your subscription for “*Lepidoptera & You!*” How would your cheerful postal delivery person ever find you?

The catalog will mysteriously arrive though, without fail. Christy and the gang? They have connections. Lots of 'em.

Footnotes

1

The Potter County State Police, in tandem with the 4H Club of Randall County Proper, run a pool every year; for \$3 you can take a stab at predicting the death toll in the Ford versus Chevy debate. The winner is announced at the Annual Palisades Country Club Picnic, halfway between Amarillo and Canyon, which doubles as the 'betting window.' The next 365 days begins and ends on picnic day and the winner(s) are announced and rewarded for their dumb luck. There's talk of raising ticket prices to \$4.

2

You ever seen one of those giant motherfuckers, all colorful and shit? Moths so big they leave that wing-dust in your hands if you manage to catch one?

Not talking about those.

The ones I have in mind were called 'millers' when I was a kid. Thousands of them, forming gray clouds all but blocking out your porch light in summer months. Stupid, gross, suicidal bugs that shit yellow enamel paint on everything while smashing headlong into the bug-resistant bulb? Those assholes.

3

By the way, an animal shitting on your remains thing? That is going to happen, make no mistake — in the future you will be an animal toilet. That, right there, that fact, the visual of a raccoon defecating onto dust that was once your precious human form? I don't know about you, but that image firmly puts the kibosh on the development of my list containing things to be happy about. I'm holding out hope for maybe a deer or a rabbit. Raccoon fecal material has been labeled “toxic waste” by the EPA (no joke).